

Key Ideas from the Keys to Quality Accreditation Project



Key Idea: **Tips for an Effective Self-Study Process** by Sue Rossetti, Director Faith Nursery School, Cranston, RI

As I reflect on accreditation, I recall many parallels to the joyful yet sometimes bumpy course of pregnancy. Both processes were nine months of excitement, anticipation, and anxiety. There was growing and developing to do good and not so good days. In the end was the fruit of our labor: Accreditation!

Recognizing the increasing need for quality early childhood care and education, I wanted to offer a program that met the highest standards of excellence. I was confident we had such a program and was prepared to engage in the intense evaluation process. Being self-confident was not enough. Significant keys were:

- Use a consultant for support, information, and advice such as you have via the Keys to Quality technical assistance staff.
- Take time to develop team spirit among staff, help them gain trust and determine which accreditation aspects concern them most so they can see how the accreditation process can truly benefit them, children, and parents as well as providing recognition for meeting national standards once accredited.
- Develop a well-paced task and timeline (such as the model Keys to Quality staff provide) and break down the process into clearly defined steps so it does not seem overwhelming.
- Provide opportunities for teachers to interact with other teachers who have experienced the accreditation process and validation visits. Both positive and negative experiences provide insights and confidence for teachers currently in the process. The Keys to Quality staff can link you to these sites or training events where such linkage can be made.
- Prepare well in advance for the validation visit (the Keys to Quality staff will be happy to help you get ready with a walk through). Make necessary changes early so that program, routine, or physical space modifications will be well established by the time of the visit. For example, waiting until a week before the visit to start hand washing before using the water table is a mistake. Children need to know what is expected of them and a chance to re-learn routine changes.

As a result of the accreditation process, our program is the strongest it has ever been, our teachers are more confident and more experienced, and our program has gained recognition and distinction.

For more information, contact the Keys to Quality Project by contacting the RI Department of Education. Education, Preschool Grant Coordinator, 401/222-4600 x 2408, e-mail: abcohen@ride.ri.net or CHILDSPAN at 401/729-0765, e-mail: RJCTS@intap.net.